

MARVEL

509

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four[®] Four



THE FANTASTIC FOUR

1 A team—and a family—of adventurers, explorers and imagonauts, the Fantastic Four lead lives both ordinary—and extraordinary. As of today:

2 Reed Richards, demonstrating increasingly erratic behavior after having been scarred in battle by Victor Von Doom and banishing Doom to Hell, laid claim to Doom's European homeland of Latveria rather than risk having Doom's advanced science and weapons plundered by those who would not understand them.

3 The United Nations, infuriated that Richards took international law into his own hands, sent in armies led by Colonel Nick Fury to undo his coup d'état—only to find that Richards' machinations extended further than simple disarmament. Reed had fooled his own teammates into believing him mad, all as part of an elaborate plan to imprison Doom forever—

4 —a plan that failed when Doom's mind possessed Ben Grimm's body and battled the team. In order to save Johnny's life in battle, Reed had no choice but to use lethal force. When the dust cleared, Doom's consciousness was indeed destroyed...but Ben Grimm lay dead. Reed Richards had killed his best friend.



STAN LEE PRESENTS
"HEREAFTER"



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**Part
 1 of 3**

SIX WEEKS AGO.

CLEAR!



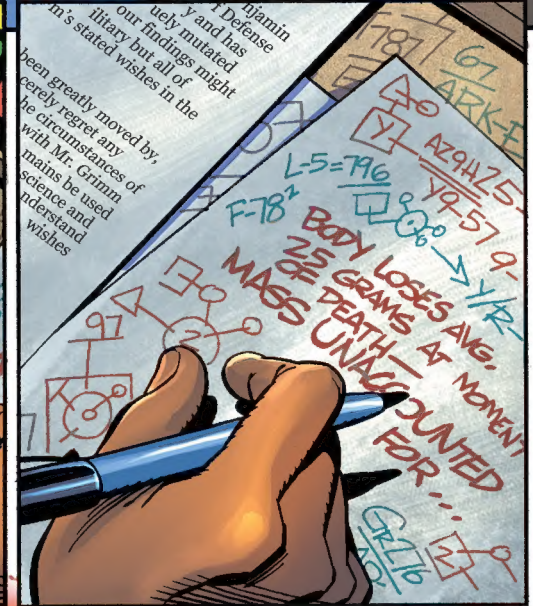
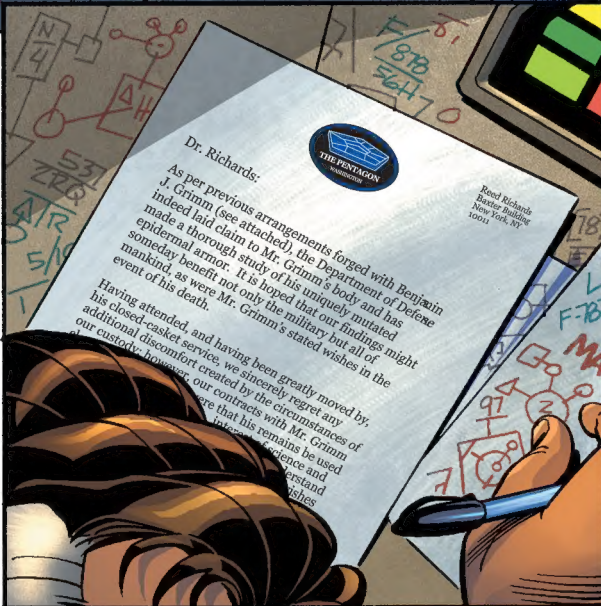
Castle Doom, Latveria.

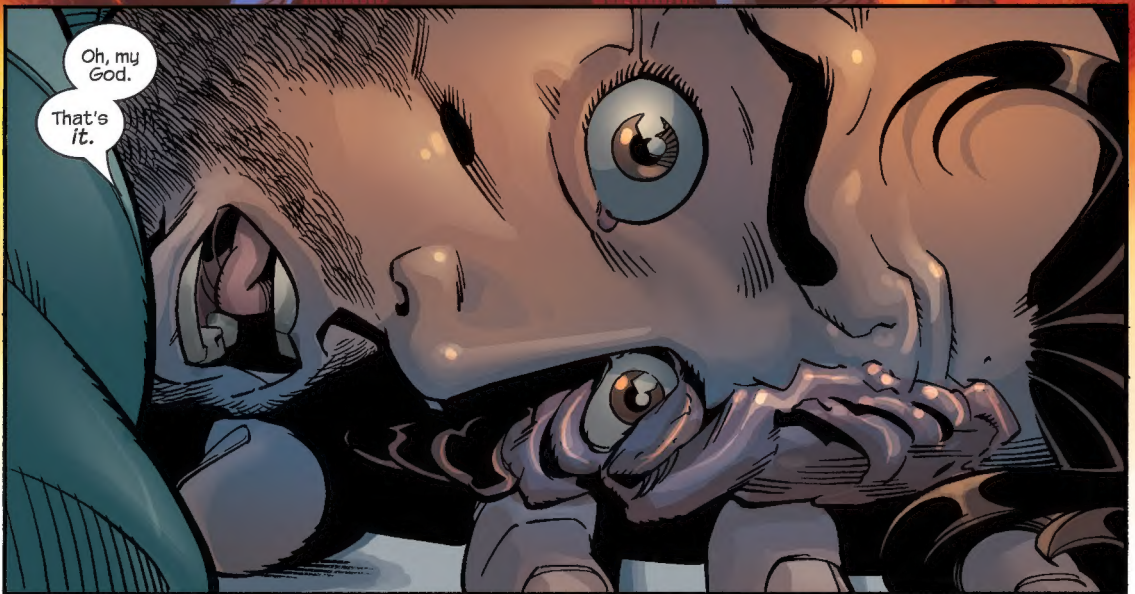
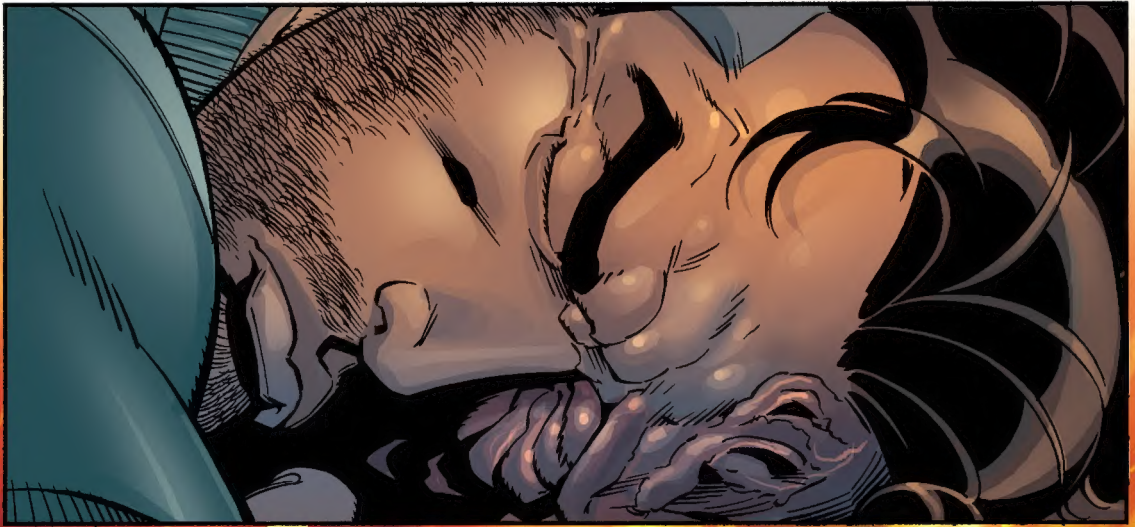


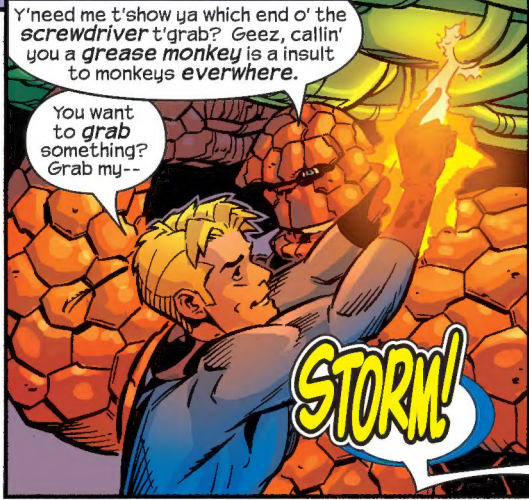
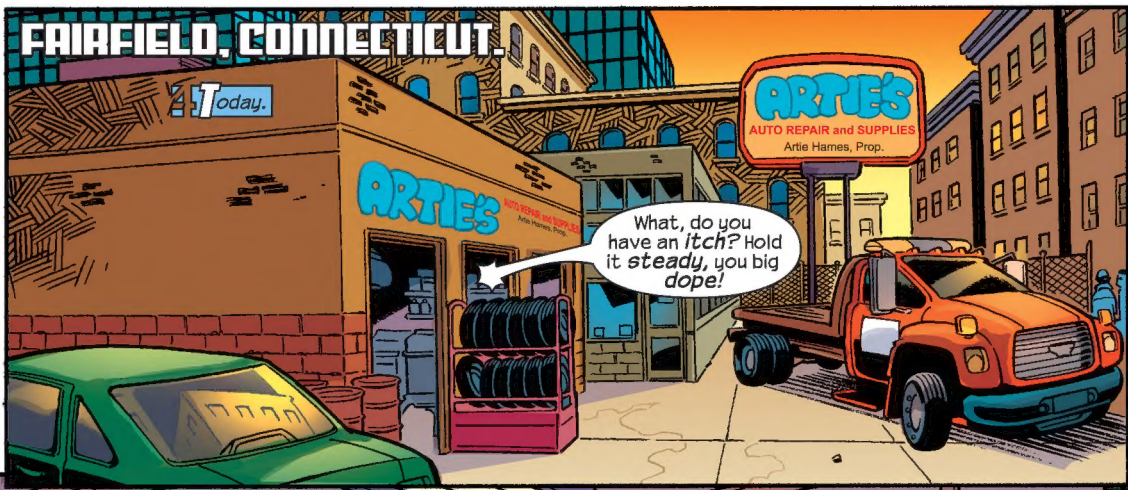


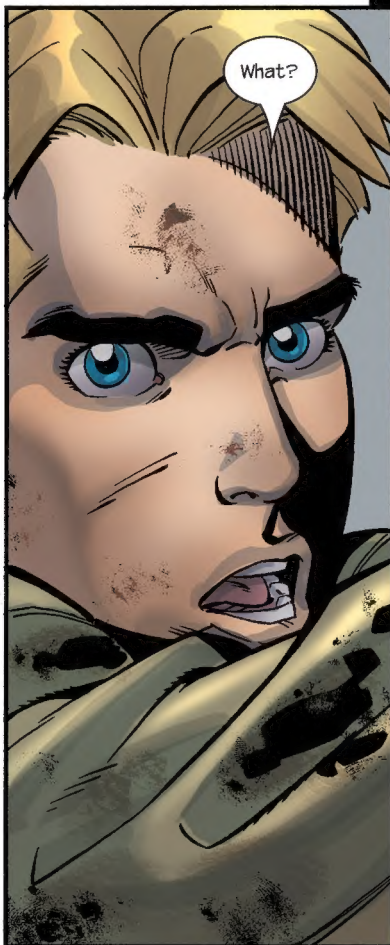
ONE WEEK AGO.

The Baxter Building, New York.









What?



"What?", he says. You mind pullin' your head outta your *exhaust*? I dunno what you're *daydreamin'* about--



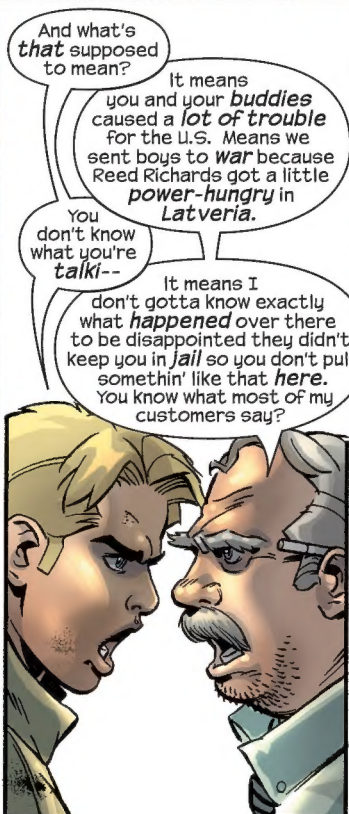
--but I promised the old bat who *owns* this flivver a *20-Minute Oil Change*, and I'm not payin' you ta stand here and *talk* to yourself!



He's sorry, Artie! Johnny's just... been through a *lot*, y'know? He's really *good*.

So you said. Show me.

aaAAaahhhh... serves me *right* f'r hirin' one of the so-called "*Fantastic Four*".



And what's *that* supposed to mean?

It means you and your *buddies* caused a *lot* of *trouble* for the U.S. Means we sent boys to *war* because Reed Richards got a little *power-hungry* in *Latveria*.

You don't know what you're *talki--*

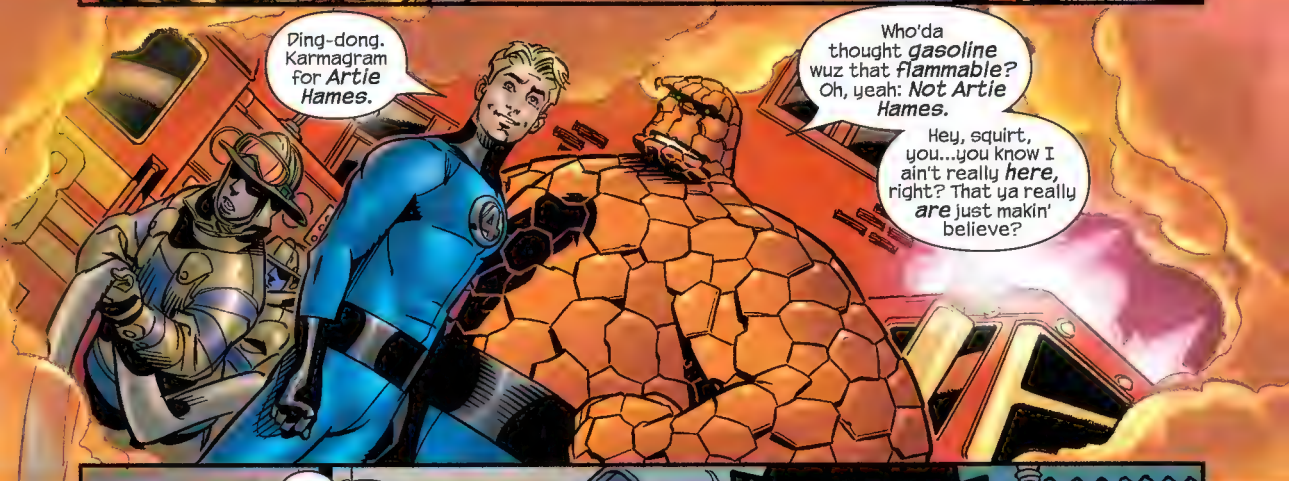
It means I don't gotta know exactly what *happened* over there to be disappointed they didn't keep you in *jail* so you don't pull somethin' like that *here*. You know what most of my customers say?



That you guys got what was *comin'* to you.



Get that hose over here!
NOW!



Ding-dong.
Karmagram
for Artie
Hames.

Who'da
thought gasoline
wuz that flammable?
Oh, yeah: Not Artie
Hames.

Hey, squirt,
you...you know I
ain't really here,
right? That ya really
are just makin'
believe?

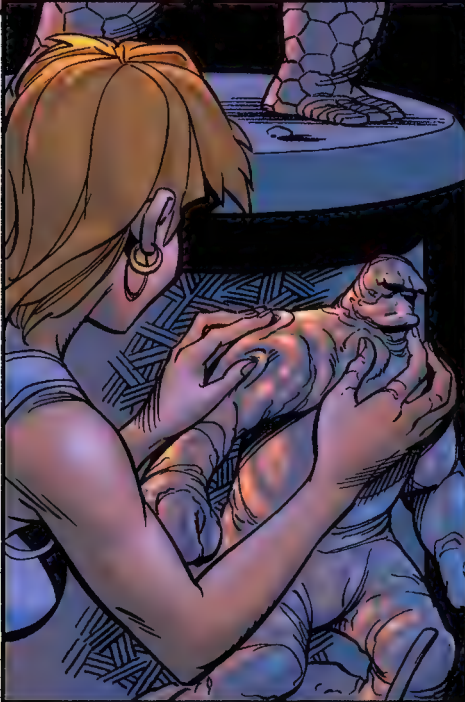
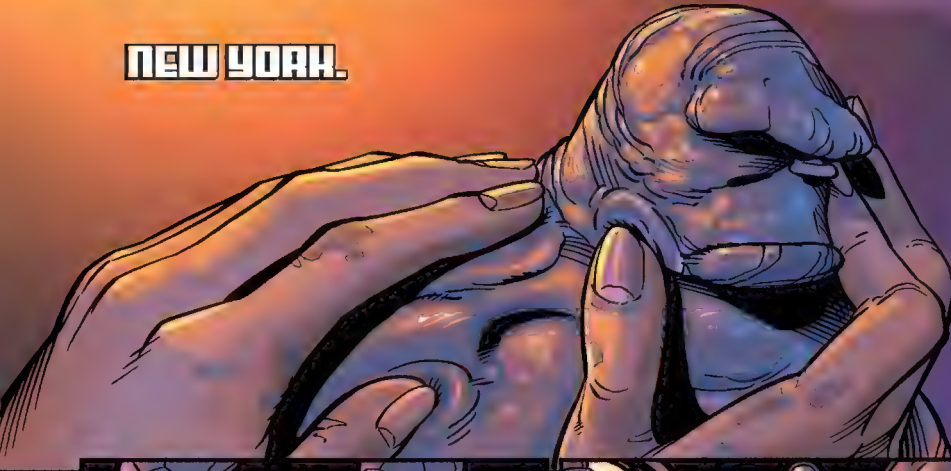


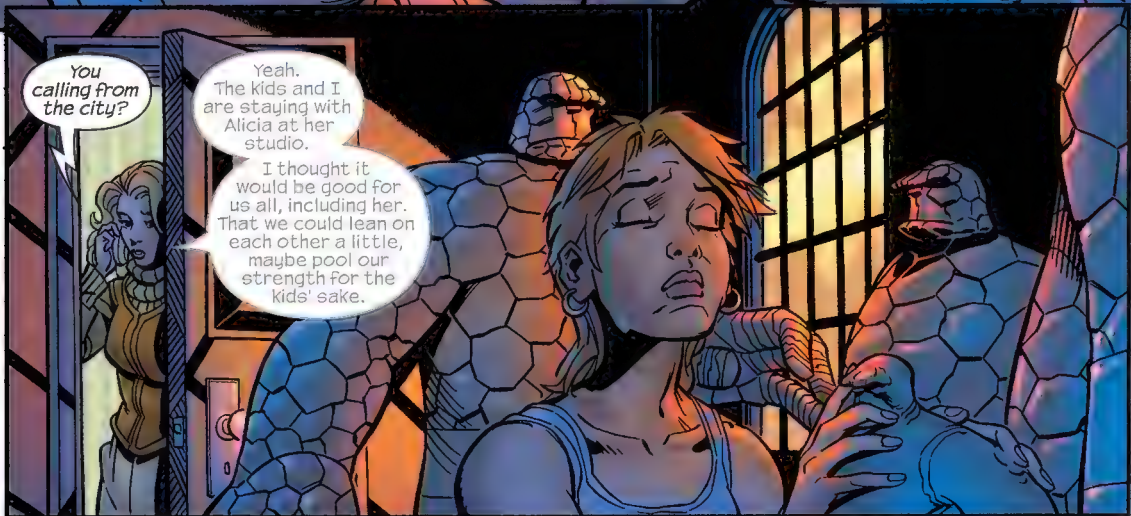
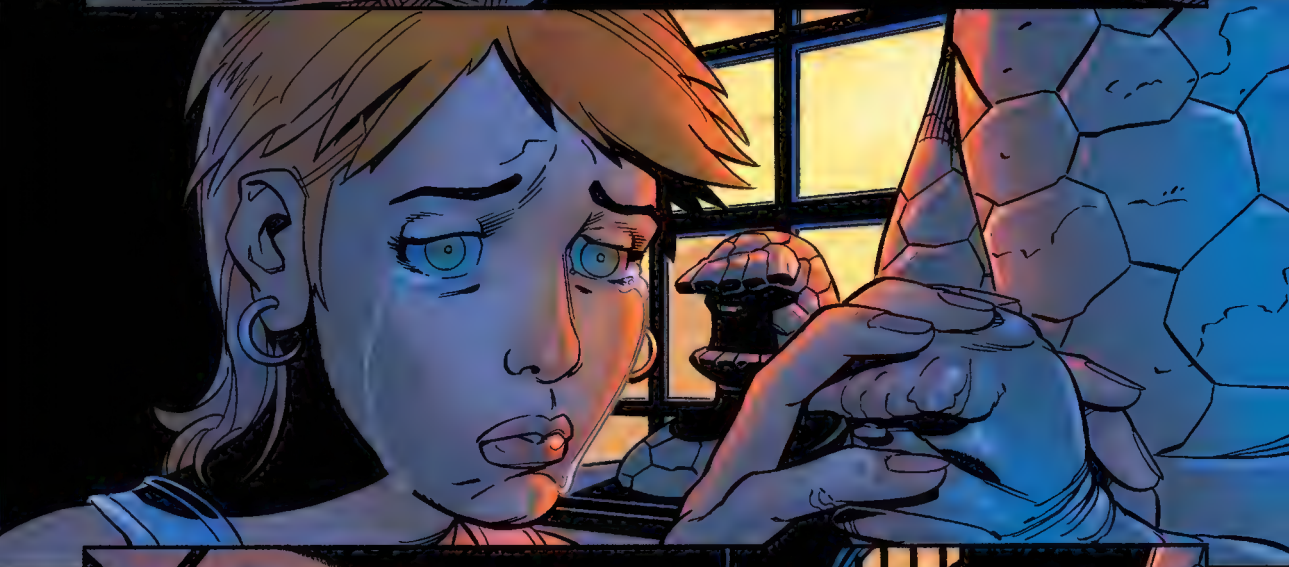
... Yeah.
But this
is how I get
through the
day.
Sue me.

?



NEW YORK.

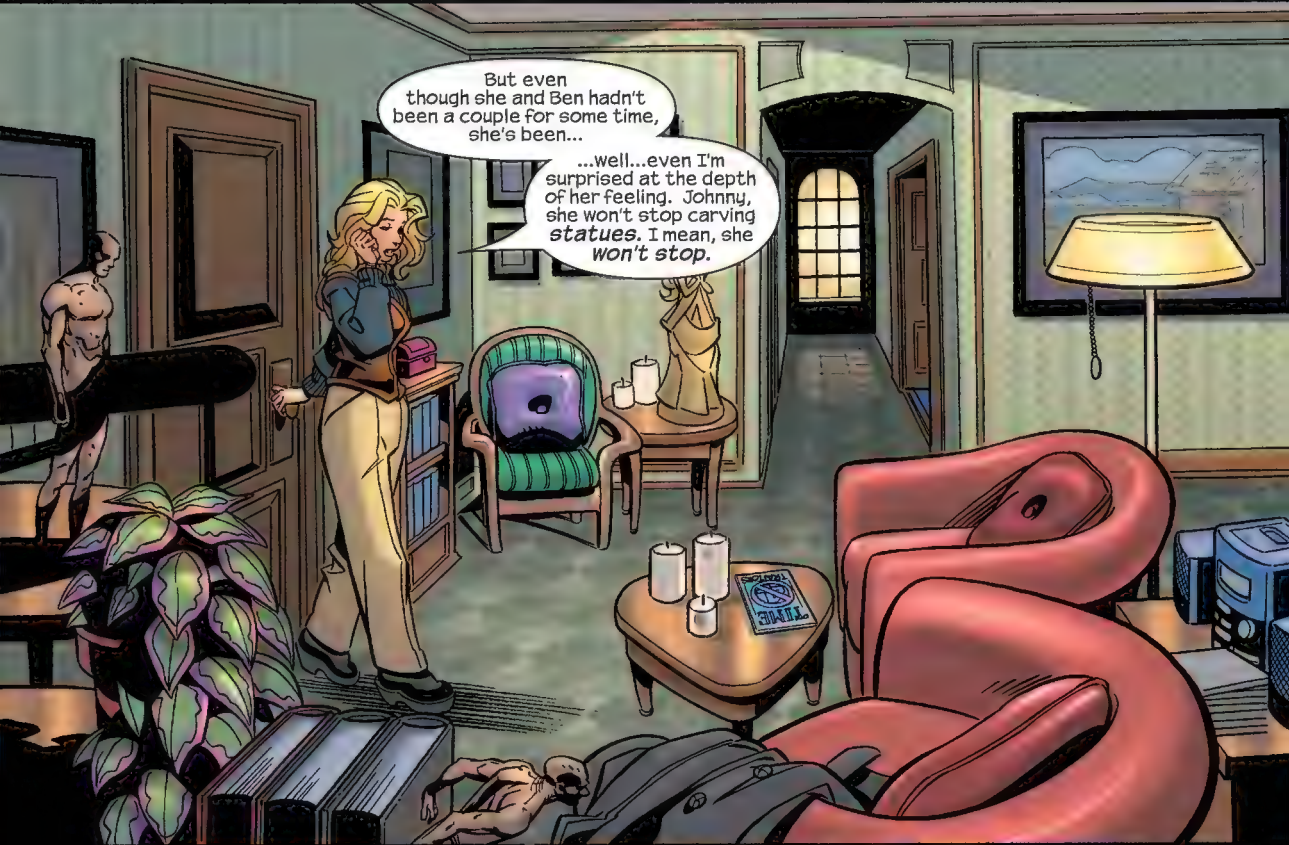




You
calling from
the city?

Yeah.
The kids and I
are staying with
Alicia at her
studio.

I thought it
would be good for
us all, including her.
That we could lean on
each other a little,
maybe pool our
strength for the
kids' sake.

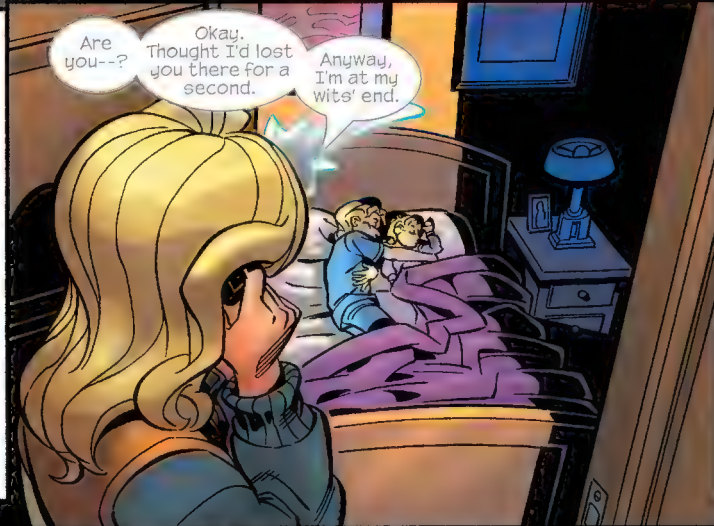
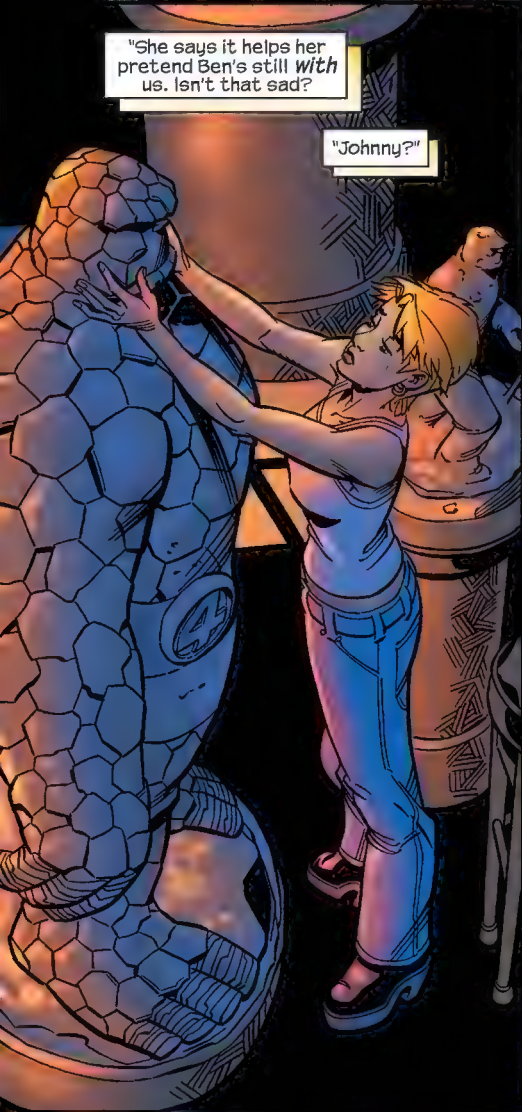


But even though she and Ben hadn't been a couple for some time, she's been...

...well...even I'm surprised at the depth of her feeling. Johnny, she won't stop carving statues. I mean, she won't stop.

"She says it helps her pretend Ben's still *with* us. Isn't that sad?"

"Johnny?"



Are you--?

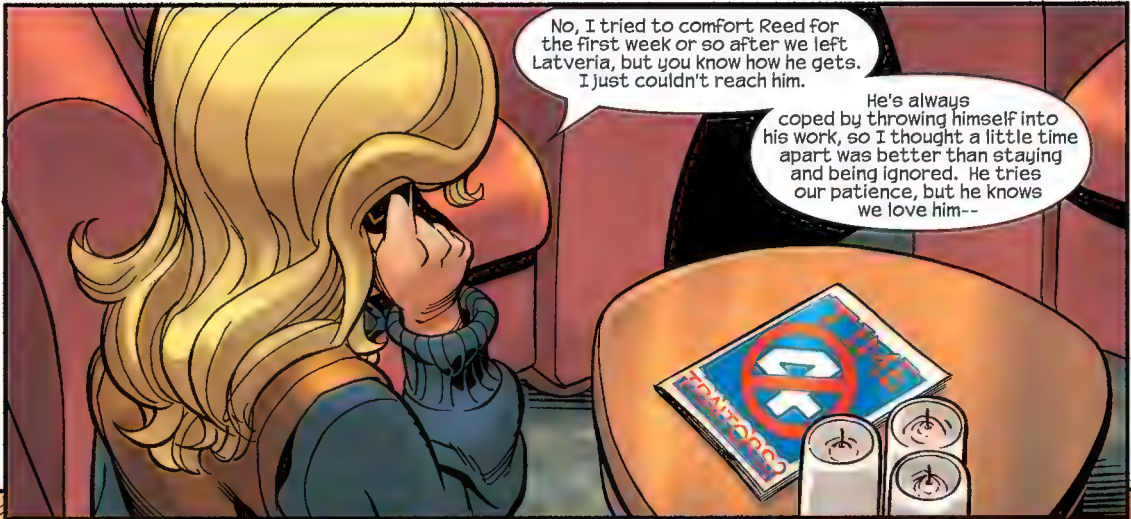
Okay. Thought I'd lost you there for a second.

Anyway, I'm at my wits' end.

I don't think it's healthy for Franklin and Val to be steeped in grief for this long...

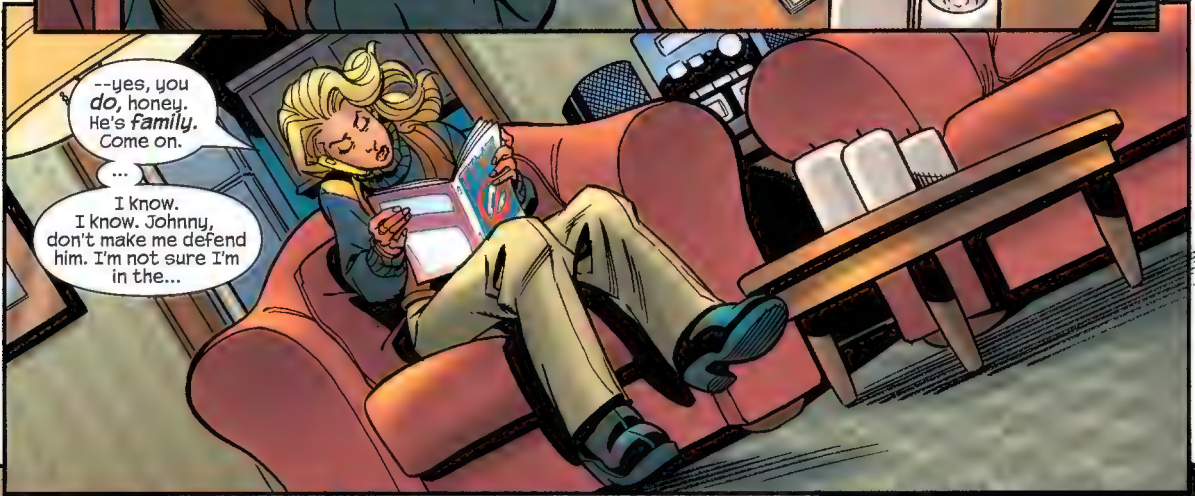
...but I can't leave Alicia in this state. I don't know *what* to do. I'm not ready to go back home.





No, I tried to comfort Reed for the first week or so after we left Latveria, but you know how he gets. I just couldn't reach him.

He's always coped by throwing himself into his work, so I thought a little time apart was better than staying and being ignored. He tries our patience, but he knows we love him--



--yes, you do, honey. He's family. Come on.

...

I know. I know. Johnny, don't make me defend him. I'm not sure I'm in the...

Agreed. Yes. Regardless of his reasons, he shouldn't have manipulated us. He should have consulted us before making choices that rui--

--that affected our lives. But it's his loss, also. Try to understand that.

I wish you'd at least give him a call to--



REASON TIMES FOUR? FF Defies U.S., U.N.

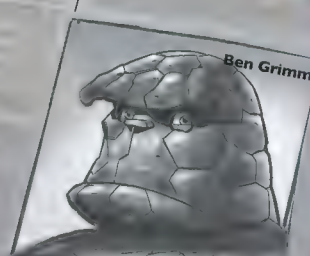
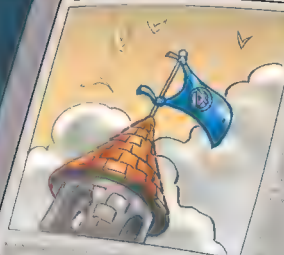
By Don DiNovi

Known throughout the world for their life-saving, even world-saving deeds, the famous quartet known as the Fantastic Four may be going through their most dangerous event of their career.

Coming under fire recently for their

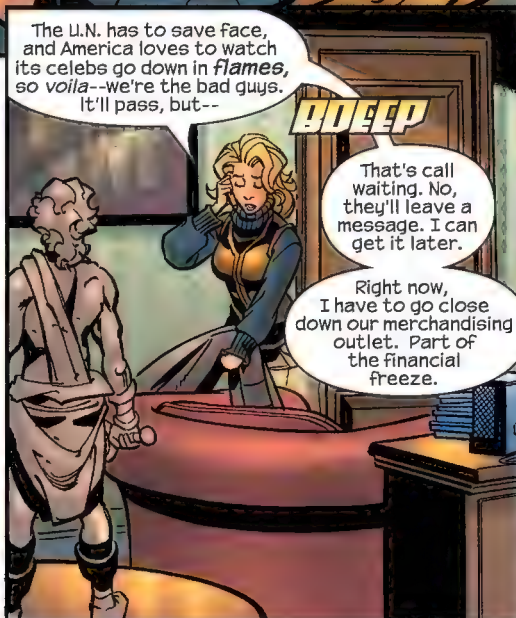
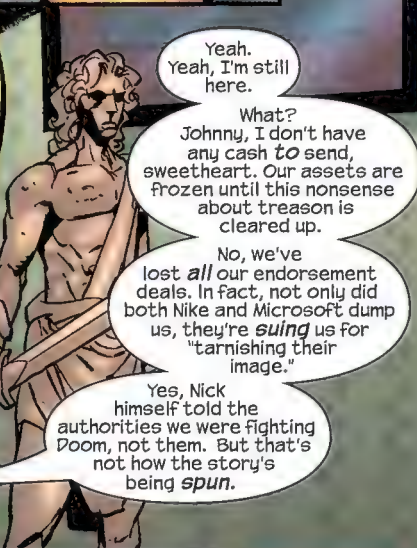
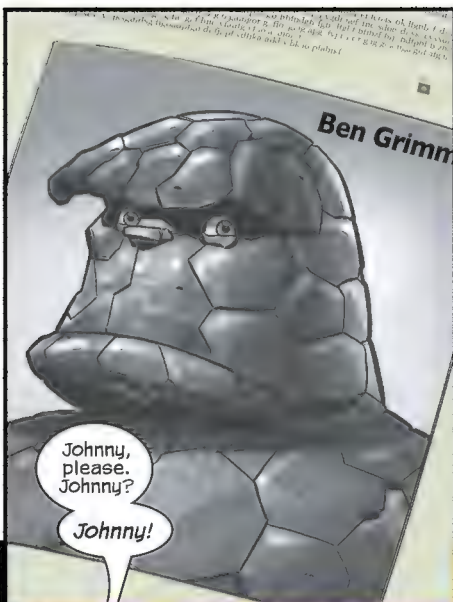
recent take over of Latveria in direct violation of U.N. charter, many believe that they have overstepped their bounds and now must face the consequences of their actions.

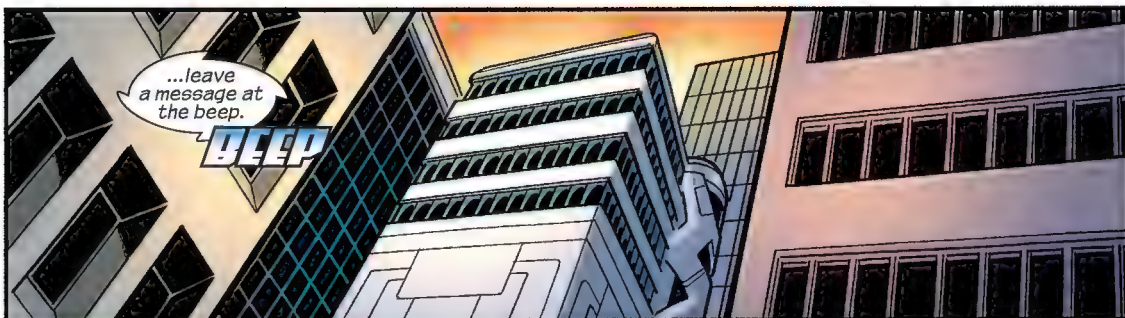
But that is not the least of their worries. The loss of one of their members, rock-like strong man Ben Grimm, lost his life in this over-costly affair. Many speculate as to the cause of his demise, but as of yet, no one is



Ben Grimm

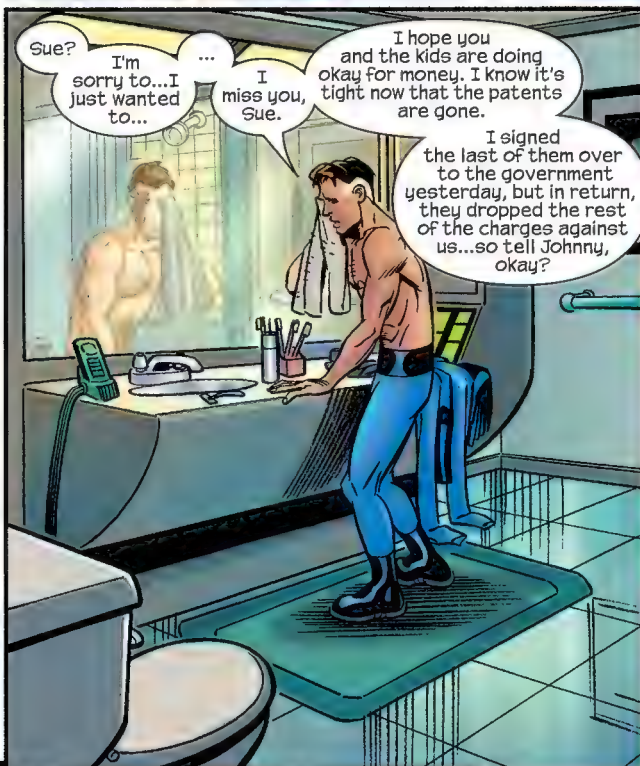
WORLD





...leave
a message at
the beep.

DEEP



Sue?

I'm
sorry to...I
just wanted
to...

...
I
miss you,
Sue.

I hope you
and the kids are doing
okay for money. I know it's
tight now that the patents
are gone.

I signed
the last of them over
to the government
yesterday, but in return,
they dropped the rest
of the charges against
us...so tell Johnny,
okay?



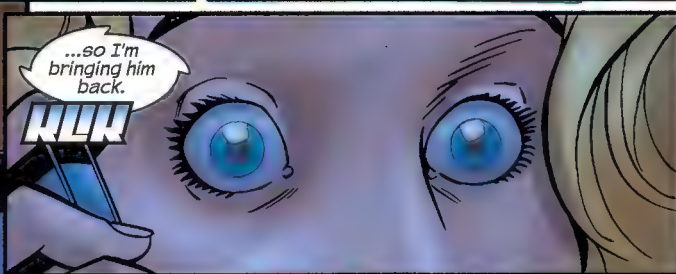
I would, but...I mean...he's
made his preferences
clear.

That's not
why I'm phoning.
It's...

The way I
kept things from you--
the way I held my cards so
close, never confiding in
anyone--that's what
destroyed the Fantastic
Four, Sue. I realize
that now.

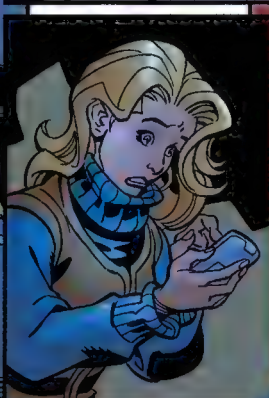


But I
promised no more secrets, so
I'm calling to tell you what I'm doing
tonight. I can't--I just can't--
stand not having Ben at my side
anymore...

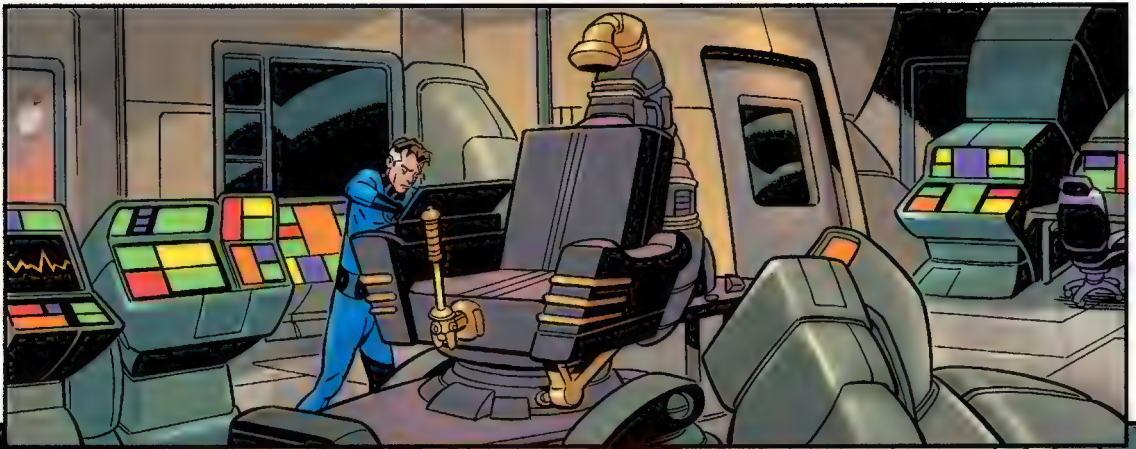


...so I'm
bringing him
back.

KLU

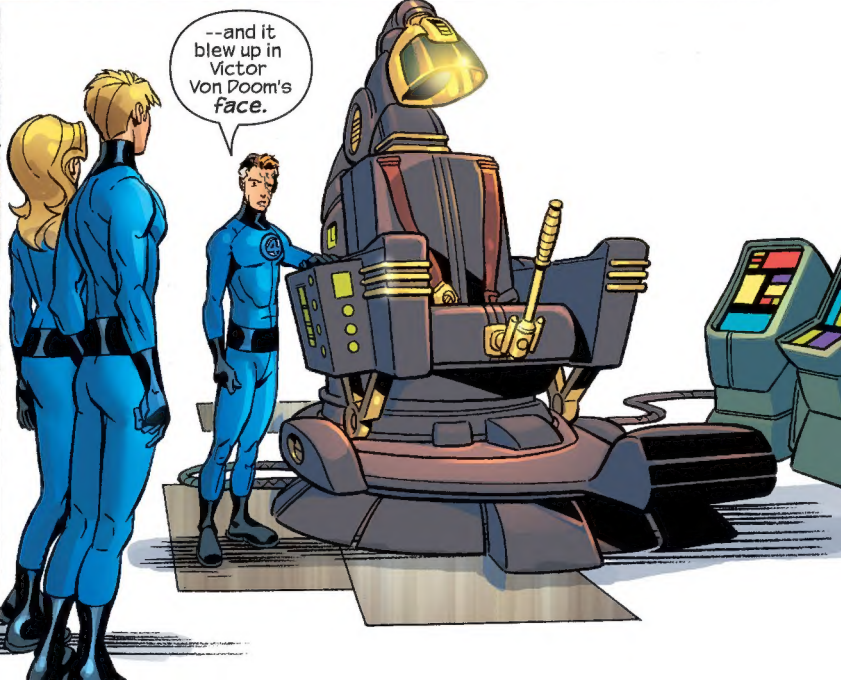
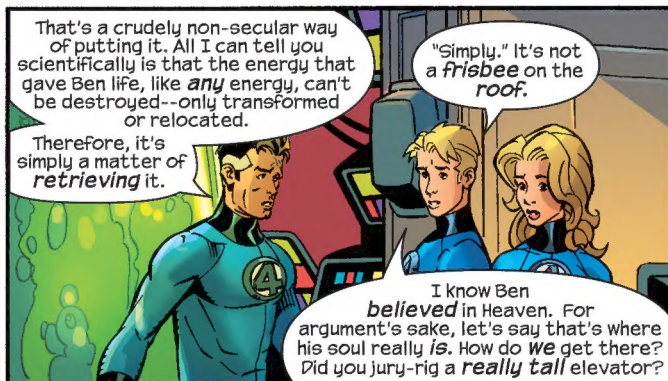
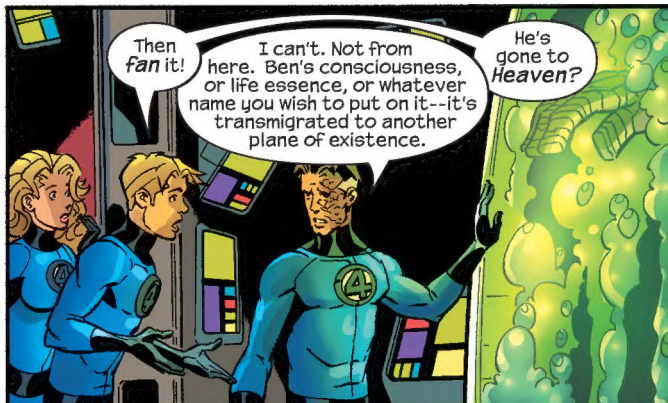


Johnny?
Johnny, don't
hang up, okay?
Just listen...





There.





No. Wait. The way I remember the story, Doom built this machine in order to contact his *mother*.

Correct.

But she was in *Hell*.

Also correct. *That*, however, he didn't learn until later. Johnny, *think* about it:



Is *Hell* the first place you'd look for *your* mother's soul?



No, this was created to get me where I want to go. If my refinements and recalculations are correct, and that's not in doubt, this *will* breach the barrier to...to...

Heaven.

To Heaven. Sue?



Sue, you haven't said a word.

I don't know what *to* say. You keep talking about Heaven like it's just another *Negative Zone*.



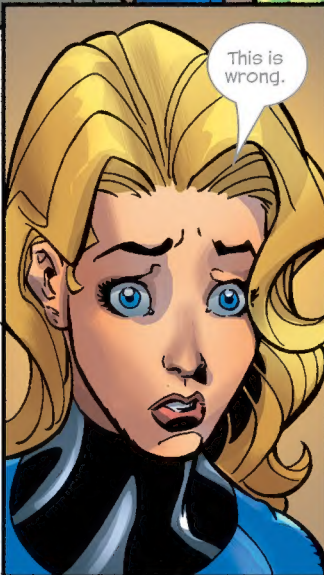
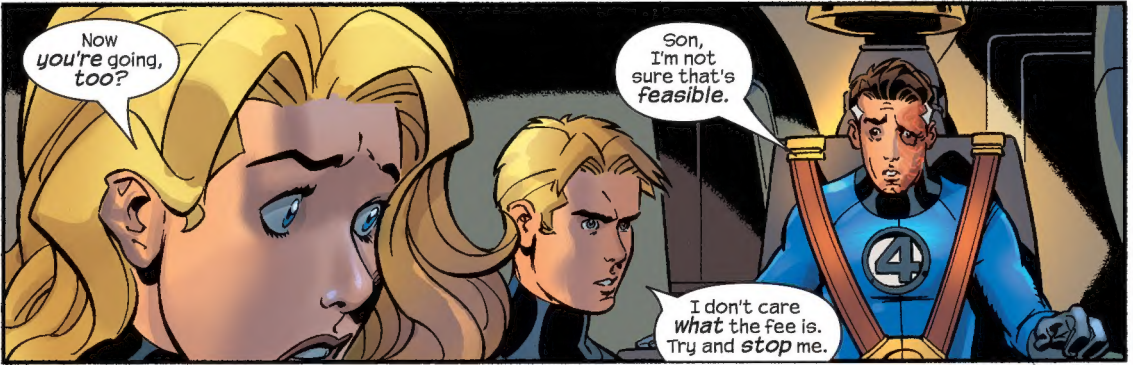
I don't want to debate theology. I want to believe Ben's in a better place, *too*. But any afterlife there may *be* is a *sacred kingdom* to *billions* of people.

It's not the "Afterverse." It's a domain of *spiritual faith*. How do you know it even *exists*?

I don't. So I'll find *out*. That's what I *do*.



That's what *we* do.





You're positive that this machine is stable? What if it blows up in your face, too?



Then I've got nothing to lose.



So what happens? Do we have a two o'clock with *God*? Do I get fitted for a *harp* and a *halo*?

Your guess is as good as *mine*.



Okay, *now* you're making me nervous.

4 TO BE CONTINUED...